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ABSTRACT

A study assessed the impact of an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program on a sample of students enrolled in the Philadelphia ABE classes during the 1977-1978 school year. In order to assess the long-term effects of the ABE program, the researcher interviewed a random sample of 267 voluntary participants of the Philadelphia ABE day session after an interval of three years following participation in the program. Among those areas examined in the study were the following: student perceptions of the skills they acquired through the program, current educational status, student voter registration and voter participation level, student participation and involvement, participation in parent/student activities, current employment status, and effects of ABE participation on skill development and employment. Analysis of the survey results affirmed the positive role of ABE in increasing students' academic skills and educational level. In addition, ABE participation resulted in increased social involvement, community participation, and improved parent school relationships. Recommendations were made calling for additional research to investigate the effects of ABE enrollment on individual attitudes and on the effects of parent ABE enrollment on children. Also recommended was initiation of counseling and referral services for ABE students. (MN)

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Assessment of Adult Basic Education Program Impact

By

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August, 1981

The author is grateful to Dr. James Ayrer, Research Associate, School District of Philadelphia, for his assistance with this study.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This study endeavored to assess the impact of an ABE Program on a sample of students enrolled in the Philadelphia ABE classes during the 1977-78 school year. There has been a tremendous dearth of information with reference to long term beneficial effects on students as a result of enrollment in one of our classes. There has never been any systematic attempt in Philadelphia to ascertain this information and to determine whether the purposes of the Adult Basic Education Program were being achieved. This study deals with only voluntary students who were not enrolled for any particular purposes or as part of some other training program. In order to reflect the reality of ABE, the study included students of every academic level, with varying degrees of achievement, and a multitude of personal goals.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study of long term effects of an ABE class, a three year interval was thought to be both reasonable and practical given the mobile nature of a large urban population. The Philadelphia program during the 1977-78 school year was composed of a total of 59 classes operating both day and evening, of varying populations, on 41 sites with a total of 4,163 students. In order to get the most equitable and uniform sample, it was decided to select only day classes which met eight hours a week and were composed of voluntary students. Other day classes and the night classes met only four hours a week. Because of this unequal exposure, it was felt not to be fair to include them. The result was that the sample was selected from a total of 17 classes,

on 10 sites, with nine teachers, and a total of 1,216 students. The aim was to get a random sample of about 300 students or about 25% of the total. Every student enrolled in each class including those who dropped out was considered as part of the baseline study. From each class's roll sheets every fourth student was selected, rejecting only those who had attended class less than 12 hours. It was felt that a student who had attended class less than 12 hours could not have achieved any measureable results. This resulted in a working sample of 267 students divided according to sex, race, marital status, and age as shown in Table I. In my opinion this breakdown is representative not only of the baseline group from which it was selected but of our overall student population. It is to be noted that our student population seems to be the opposite of that of the state as a whole, inasmuch as it tends to be mostly female, black, single, and within the 16 to 34 age group.

TABLE I

See next page

TABLE I

ABE STUDENTS INCLUDED IN PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

	Total	Number Interviewed	Percent
	267	89	.333
Sex			
Male	90	26	.288
Female	177	63	.355
Race			
Black	246	81	.329
White	15	7	.466
Hispanic	6	1	.166
Marital Status			
Single	184	59	.320
Married	36	15	.416
Div/Sep	39	12	.307
Widow	8	3	.375
Age			
16-24	150	43	.286
25-34	64	19	.296
35-44	25	13	.520
45-54	20	9	.450
55-64	3	2	.666
65+	5	3	.600

After much thought, deliberation, and review of the literature, it had previously been determined that a telephone survey would not only have the most chance of success but was the most feasible and practical approach. Accordingly, a questionnaire (Attachment A) was developed. This also fulfilled another aim of this project, namely that of constructing such an instrument with the idea of using it as a prototype for future surveys throughout the state. Each student located was asked the questions as listed. However, it is felt that the questionnaire as used is too long, cumbersome, and repetitive. The same information can be obtained with many fewer questions. Given the wide rage of abilities of our students, many of the questions are not only unnecessary, but confusing. It is therefore suggested that any future surveys use the questionnaire as amended (Attachment B).

Approximately one-third of the target group was located and answered the questionnaire. Of the other two-thirds who were not reached 146 could not be located, either at the original telephone number listed on the class roll sheet, any forwarding number, or at the number listed for "the person who would be most likely to know where to reach you" as stated on the Student Intake Data Form. One was dead and another was in jail. The remaining 30 of this 178 not reached were almost located and known to be alive but after 11 or 12 calls to each of their homes, it was decided that it was useless to pursue them further and they are not included.

Of the number located and interviewed, as shown on Table I, the

ratio in each category between those located and those who were not was about 30 to 40% with the exception of the Hispanics. This group was the lowest in number and the ratio dropped to 16%. The other difference is in the over 35 age group who were also few in number and here the number rose to 50 and 60%

To each person who answered my phone call, I introduced myself and stated that I was an ABE teacher with the Philadelphia School District. I then asked to speak to the student I was seeking. When the student came to the phone, I stated the following:

> "Hello, this is Mrs. Bramnick, an ABE Teacher, with the School District. We're doing a study to see what has happened to our students since they were in an ABE class. I understand you attended our class at _____, in_____, and your teacher was _____. I wonder if you would mind answering some questions about what has happened to you since you were in the class. Your name will not be used and the information will not be connected with you."

The fact that I was a teacher in the program, named their class site and their teacher with obvious familiarity gave me a great deal of credibility. I feel quite strongly that this made many of the people more willing to respond. All of those located were very polite and seemed very pleased with our interest. Each student I located agreed to respond to at least part of the questionnaire. Three students refused to answer the questions about being registered to vote and voting. One of these same students also wouldn't answer any questions with regard to her involvement with her children or her employment situation. Another, who did say she was registered to vote, would say only

that and that she was currently enrolled in a class. Otherwise their cooperation within the limits of their abilities to comprehend some of the questions was all that could be desired. In order to obtain the information from the 89 students considered in the study, there was an average of 2.6 calls per student. Although 42 or almost half were reached on the very first call, on the other hand it took 8 or 9 calls to catch some of them at home. Each interview took an average of 10.1 minutes with 13 lasting more than that and 15 less.

FINDINGS

TABLE II

STUDENTS REPORTING IMPROVED SKILLS

Improved READING Skills	Improved MATH Skills	Improved WRITING Skills	Learn Consumer Skills
69	72	71	44
.775	.808	.797	.494

The results of the interviews with regard to improved academic skills are detailed in Table II. It is especially gratifying to learn that about 80% of the students felt that their reading, math, and writing skills were improved as a result of their attendance in class. Also noteworthy to point out is that a number of students including some of the 30% who eventually obtained their GED diploma were unable to make the connection that going to class to prepare to take your GED examination had to, of necessity, mean that you were going to improve at least one of your academic skills. Since no account was made of the students' academic levels on entry, it is entirely possible that some of

the 20% that did not feel as if they had improved might have, unfortunately, been unable to improve. It is interesting to note the comparatively low number of students who reported learning any consumer skills. With the increasing emphasis on the APL, real life, and coping skills it would be interesting to see if future surveys find students acknowledging increased exposure and learning.

TABLE III

STUDENTS REPORTING COURSE ENROLLMENT

Enrolled	Plan Future Enrollment	Obtained GED Diploma
51	70	26
.573	.786	.292

TABLE IV

See next page

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN COURSES

	Total	Percent
Sex		
Male	16	.313
Female	35	.686
Race		
Black	47	.921
White	3	.058
Hispanic	1	.019
Marital Status		
Single	35	.686
Married	6	.117
Div/Sep	8	.156
Widow	2	.039
Age		
16-24	28	.549
25-34	7	.137
35-44	8	.156
45-54	5	.098
55-64	1	.019
65+	2	.039

Students reported being currently enrolled in college community college, various technical schools, and OIC, as well as ABE and GED classes. Their future plans included enrolling in schools for a wide variety of courses, such as photography, nursing, tailoring, typing, clerical, data processing, electronics, auto body repair, restaurant, fashion merchandising, X-Ray technician, and teacher.

TABLE V

STUDENTS REGISTERED TO VOTE AND VOTING

	Number	Percent
Registered	75	.842
Vote 1979	63	.840
Vote 1980	58	.773

The questions about being registered to vote and voting were prefaced with the words "You don't have to answer these next questions if you don't care to." It is interesting to note that of the 14 students not registered to vote, 3, as previously stated, simply refused to answer that question. Two others volunteered the information that they were not registered because of religious reasons. Five of the remaining 9 stated that they were planning to register. Of those registered 63 or .84 had voted in either the 1980 presidential primary or presidential election.

TABLE VI

STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

	Total	Percent
Increased Community Participation	48	.539
Increased Social Involvement	42	.471
Comfortable Talking	62	.696
Increased use of Library	29	.325
Read More Books	60	.674
Read More Magazines	46	.516

In the section of the Questionnaire labelled Social Interaction, students were asked to respond in terms of more, less, the same, or no opinion. Only those who answered "more" were counted in the figures as shown in Table VI above. An answer of "more" to either the use of health centers, community groups, employment agencies, or an appropriate "other" group constituted the .539 reported as demonstrating increased participation in community activities. In the same manner a "more" answer to either involvement with church groups, athletic groups, or an appropriate other group comprised the .471 listed as reporting increased social involvement. While not quite 33% said they used the library more frequently, 67% said they read more books and 52% reported reading more magazines. One assumes that this is happening because of their improved reading skills.

TABLE VII

PARTICIPATION IN PARENT/SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Have School Age Children	Increased Attendance PTA Meetings	Increased Interaction with Teachers and Principals	Increased Help with Homework
40	14	19	28
.449	.350	.350	.700

Of the total sample 40 or .449 students had school age children. On the basis of answer choices as described with reference to Table VII above, of those who did have school age children 14 or .350 said that they attended PTA meetings more frequently. Nineteen or .475 felt more comfortable and talked more to their children's teachers and principals on a variety of subjects. Seventy percent (28) of those with children helped them with their homework more frequently and on a regular basis. It is probably safe to say that this is because of the parents' increased confidence in their own skills and their commitment to the importance of education and the learning of basic skills. It is my general impression also that if parents were involved at all with their children's schooling, that it was in all three areas. The fact that only the "more" answers were counted mitigated against a larger percentage. Of the 40 students who were counted as having school age children, one stated that the children lived with their mother, and another said that since he worked at night, that it was his wife who was involved with all of the children's school related activities. Two other students would not answer these questions.

TABLE VIII

CURRENTLY EMPLOYED STUDENTS

	Number of Students	Percent
Sex		
Male	12	.461
Female	20	.317
Race		
Black	27	.333
White	4	.571
Hispanic	1	1.000
Marital Status		
Single	22	.372
Married	7	.466
Div/Sep	3	.250
Widow	0	0
Age		
16-24	16	.372
25-34	7	.368
35-44	6	.461
45-54	3	.333
55-64	0	0
65 +	0	0

In this era of high unemployment, it was gratifying to learn that 32 or .359 were employed either full or part time. Here again, two of the students would not answer the question.

TABLE IX

RESULTS OF ATTENDANCE OF ABE CLASS OF CURRENTLY AND PREVIOUSLY EMPLOYED STUDENTS

	Number	Percent
Total	36	.404
Helped Get Job	26	.812
Helped Get Promotion	6	.187
Increased Job Security or Pay	14	.437
Improved Reading Skills	30	.833
Improved Math Skills	32	.888
Improved Writing Skills	31	.861
Obtained GED Diploma	13	.361

Table VIII shows the distribution of only those currently employed students while Table IX combines both those currently employed and those previously employed, but not at the time of the interview. It details these students' perception of whether their enrollment in an ABE Class helped them in the area of employment as well as improved their academic skills. It is gratifying to note that .812 felt that it had helped them to get a job. It is more difficult to get definitive answers in the other areas listed on the questionnaire. Because of the many peripheral items involved in entry level jobs, this probably accounts for the lower figures. Of the 57 students who were unemployed at the time of the interview, only 29 or .508 stated that they were looking for employment.

Some were unable to look because of ill health, others were in school, while still others stated either that they wanted to wait until they passed their GED examination or until their children were older.

All of the students with the exceptions of those previously noted were very receptive. It was quite touching to hear how pleased they were to learn of our interest in them. Very few questioned how I was going to use the information. For the most part they were extremely cooperative and even when they refused to answer certain questions, they were not hostile. I have some slight reservations about the ability of a few of the students to fully understand the questions. Some were bitter that they had been unable to get closer to obtaining a GED diploma. They seemed quite discouraged and acted almost as if to give up hope.

Many of the students asked for news of their teachers and for a variety of other information. This included:

Current locations of ABE and GED classes,

Locations of career education and job seeking skill courses,

B. E. O. G. information,

Procedures for taking GED examinations, and

Location of School District Technical Courses.

In addition to helping them with these requests, I was also able to suggest libraries close to their homes where they could obtain other types of information and books. There were also a number of questions with regard to their children's schools and I tried to give them suggestions as to whom they might contact for help.

Another reaction of interest is that many of the students simply did not connect the fact that their improved academic skills as well as their willingness to become increasingly involved in the world around them is what contributed to their increased success at being able to get and hold a job. Their answers attested to the fact that they had met their personal goals of improved skills and by the fact that a number of them had passed their GED examination.

CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that our students have achieved many benefits from attending an ABE class. At the very least, acquisition of literacy skills enables disadvantaged adults to function more effectively in their day to day lives. The many affirmative answers to questions designed to evaluate their further assimilation into society, participation in community affairs, social involvement, and involvement in parent/school situations attest to this. Their own ongoing enrollment in a school situation or employment signifies the other aspects of the benefits of class attendance. It is interesting to note that on a comparative percentage basis more women than men, more blacks than white, and more single persons than married students were enrolled in classes. However, in the area of employment the opposite was true with a higher percentage of men than women, white persons than black, and married students than single individuals.

Many students also volunteered the information that class attendance had given them increased confidence in the job seeking situation. One assumes that this, in turn, increased the number who are employed.

Provision should be made for standard and periodic follow-up of the students. It should be made known to them at the outset that this is going to occur. While students generally enroll in an ABE class to improve their academic skills or to obtain a GED diploma, the concomitant aims of social involvement, community participation, and improved parent/school relationships should also be reiterated and reinforced with appropriate instruction and competency building. Additional data should be obtained on enrollment with regard to their attitudes so that further follow-up could be more precise.

Strenuous efforts must also be made to impart some of the real life, coping, and parenting skills. Some thought might also be given to making an attempt to determine if attendance of an ABE class by a parent has been of benefit to their children.

It would be ideal if an ongoing counselling and referral service could be instituted for both academic and vocational guidance. We must also do more to help our students realistically assess their capabilities so as to reduce some of the vast discrepancies between their aims and future achievements.

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ATTACHMENT A

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

I - Attainment of Educational Goals *	y	n		
1. Did you go to the ABE class to improve your reading?				
2. Do you feel that as a result of your attendance in class that your reading skills were improved?				
3. Did you go to class to improve your math?				
4. Do you feel that your math skills were improved?				
5. Did you go to improve your grammar and writing skills?				
6. Do you feel that these skills were improved?				
7. Do you feel that you learned any consumer skills?				
8. Did you enroll in the ABE class to prepare for the GED diploma?				
9. Do you feel that the class helped you to do this?				
10. Did you enroll in the class to prepare for another program?				
11. If so, which one?				
12. Do you feel that the program helped you to prepare for this program?				

II - Social Interaction	m	l	s	n
1. Since you last came to an ABE class, do you feel that you use the library?				
2. What about clinics and health centers, do you feel that you use them?				
3. Do you feel that you are involved with community groups				
4. Which ones?				
5. Do you feel that you use employment agencies?				

II - Social Interaction (continued)	y	n		
6. Do you feel that you have become involved with church groups?				
7. Do you feel that you have participated in athletic groups?				
8. Do you feel that you have become involved with any other groups?				
9. If so, which ones?				
10. Do you feel as if you talk to people				
11. How comfortable do you feel about studying?				
12. How about reading books? Do you feel you read				
13. And magazines, do you feel you read them				
The next five questions refer to voting. You do not need to answer them if you don't care to.				
14. Are you registered to vote?				
15. If not, are you planning to register?				
16. Did you vote in the 1979 mayoral election?				
17. Did you vote in the May,1980, primary?				
18. Are you planning to vote (or did you vote) in the November presidential election?				

III - Parent - School Relations	m	l	s	n
1. Do you have school age children?				
2. If so, how many are under 18?				
3. What are their ages?				
4. Since you were in ABE, do you attend parents' meetings at school?				
5. Do you feel that you talk to teachers and principals				
6. What kinds of things have you talked about?				

Attachment A (continued)

III - Parent - School Relations (continued)	m	l	s	n
7. Do you feel that you help your children with their homework?				
8. How many times a week?				
IV - Educational Continuance	**y**	**n**		
1. Since you attended that ABE class, have you attended any other ABE class?				
2. If so, where?				
3. Sponsored by whom?				
4. If no, do you plan to enroll in an ABE class in the future?				
5. Have you attended a GED class?				
6. If so, where?				
7. Sponsored by whom?				
8. Did you obtain a GED diploma?				
9. When?				
10. If no, do you plan to enroll in a GED class in the future?				
11. Have you attended a technical school?				
12. Did you finish?				
13. If no, do you plan to enroll in a technical school in the future?				
14. Have you attended Jr. College?				
15. Did you finish?				
16. If no, do you plan to enroll in a Jr. College in the future?				
17. Have you attended college?				
18. If no, do youplan to enroll in college in the future?				

Attachment A (continued)

IV - Educational Continuance (continued)	y	n		
19. Have you been involved in any other kind of training?				
20. If so, what kind?				
21. Do you plan to enroll in any type of training in the future?				
V - Occupational Status				
1. Are you working - full time?				
2. Are you working - part time?				
3. If you are not working, are you looking for work?				
4. Do you feel that attending an ABE class helped you get a job?				
5. Helped you get a better job?				
6. Helped you keep your job?				
7. Helped you get a promotion?				
8. Helped you get increased job security?				
9. Helped you get increased pay?				

Age in 1977 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+
Marital Status Single Married Div/Sep Widow
Race Hisp Black Asian White
Sex Male Female

Name No.

Interview Date Time Length

Recalls

* y - yes
  n - no
  m - more
  l - less
  s - same
  n - no opinion

ATTACHMENT B

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

I - Attainment of Educational Goals *	y	n		
1. Did you go to the ABE class to improve your reading?				
2. Do you feel that as a result of your attendance in class that your reading skills were improved?				
3. Did you go to class to improve your math?				
4. Do you feel that your math skills were improved?				
5. Did you go to improve your grammar and writing skills?				
6. Do you feel that these skills were improved?				
7. Do you feel that you learned any consumer skills?				
8. Did you enroll in the ABE class to prepare for the GED diploma?				
9. Do you feel that the class helped you to do this?				

II - Social Interaction	m	l	s	n
1. Since you last came to an ABE class, do you feel that you use the library				
2. What about clinics and health centers, do you feel that you use them?				
3. Do you feel that you are involved with community groups				
4. Which ones?				
5. Do you feel that you use employment agencies?				
6. Do you feel that you have become involved with church groups?				
7. Do you feel that you have participated in athletic groups?				
8. Do you feel that you have become involved with any other groups?				
9. If so, which ones?				
10. Do you feel as if you talk to people				

II - Social Interaction (continued)	m	l	s	n
11. How comfortable do you feel about studying?				
12. How about reading books? Do you feel you read				
13. And magazines, do you feel you read them				
The next five questions refer to voting. You do not need to answer them if youdon't care to.	y	n		
14. Are you registered to vote?				
15. If not, are you planning to register?				
16. Did you vote in the 1979 mayoral election?				
17. Did you vote in the May, 1980, primary?				
18. Are you planning to vote (or did you vote) in the November presidential election?				

III - Parent - School Relations	m	l	s	n
1. Do you have school age children?				
2. If so, how many are under 18?				
3. What are their ages?				
4. Since you were in ABE, do you attend parents' meetings at school?				
5. Do you feel that you talk to teachers and principals				
6. What kinds of things have you talked about?				
7. Do you feel that you help your children with their homework?				
8. How many times a week?				

IV - Educational Continuance	y	n		
1. Since you attended that ABE class, have you attended any other ABE class?				
2. If so, where?				
3. Sponsored by whom?				
4. If no, do you plan to enroll in an ABE class in the future?				

ATTACHMENT B (continued)

IV - Educational Cotinuance (continued)	y	n	
5. Have you attended a GED class?			
6. If so, where?			
7. Sponsored by whom?			
8. Did you obtain a GED diploma?			
9. When?			
10. If no, do you plan to enroll in a GED class in the future?			
11. Have you attended any other class?			
12. If so, what kind?			
13. Did you finish?			
14. Do you feel that the ABE class helped you to prepare for this course?			
15. Do you plan to enroll in any other kind of training in the future?			
16. If so, what kind?			
V - Occupational Status			
1. Are you working - full time?			
2. Are you working - part time?			
3. If you are not working, are you looking for work?			
4. Do you feel that attending an ABE class increased your confidence?			
5. Do you feel that attending an ABE class helped you get a job?			
6. Helped you get a better job?			
7. Helped you keep your job?			
8. Helped you get a promotion?			
9. Helped you get increased job security?			
10. Helped you get increased pay?			

ATTACHMENT B (continued)

Age in 1977	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Marital Status	Single	Married	Div/Sep	Widow		
Race	Hisp	Black	Asian	White		
Sex	Male	Female				

Name No.

Interview Date Time Length

Recalls

* y - yes
n - no
m - more
l - less
s - same
n - no opinion